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STATE FOR EUR/NCE, EUR/ACE, EUR/UMB

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [BO](#) [EZ](#)

SUBJECT: CZECH DIPLOMATS MAY FACE EXPULSIONS FROM BELARUS

Classified By: A/DCM Martin Hohe for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

11. (C) Summary: Chilly relations between the Czech Republic and Belarus have nearly frozen in the aftermath of a Belarusian television broadcast that accused the Czech Embassy in Minsk of subversive activities and distributing propaganda to extremist groups. (Note: the document is actually a UN human rights report on Belarus.) The incident has led to fears the Lukashenko regime may expel Czech diplomats from Belarus. Czechs have taken a non-confrontational stance in the hope of diffusing the hostilities. End Summary.

12. (U) On February 19, Belarusian state-run television showed images (filmed several weeks earlier) of democratic opposition members removing printed material from the Czech Embassy in Minsk and placing them in private vehicles. The broadcast asserted the material was "propaganda" distributed to extremist groups in Belarus.

13. (SBU) Czech FM Cyril Svoboda confirmed at a press conference in Prague on February 23 that the material in question is actually a UN report on human rights violations in Belarus (translated into Belarusian). Democratic opposition party chairman Vincuk Viachorka confirmed this during his conversation with Ambassador Cabaniss February 23 on the margins of a MFA-hosted conference on Belarus (to be reported septel). The UN report contains information about disappearances and other serious human rights violations carried out by the Lukashenko regime.

14. (C) According to Marek Toman of the Czech MFA's Transformation Cooperation Unit, the Czech Embassy provides the UN report to any Belarusian who requests it. Democratic opposition members also distribute it. Since October 2005, they have distributed as many as two-thirds of the reports, an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 copies. Toman said the Belarusian KGB became aware of these activities at some point and monitored the Embassy until they succeeded in filming the transfer of reports from the Embassy to the opposition. Toman said the opposition members shown in the broadcast were detained and questioned by the KGB, but not imprisoned -- yet.

15. (C) Czech Charge d'Affaires Vladimir Ruml was summoned to the Belarusian MFA February 23 to receive a sharp rebuke for Czech "subversive activities" in Belarus. According to Toman, Ruml was forced to stand throughout the ordeal, and was not permitted to defend the Embassy's actions. The GOB officials informed Ruml they are considering the "most serious" sanctions against the Czech Republic. The Czechs believe that the threat refers to diplomatic expulsions. Toman said the current Czech strategy is to try to diffuse the level of hostility as much as possible; therefore, the Czechs do not intend to prepare diplomatic notes or otherwise challenge the regime on the incident. However, the Czechs did issue a press

release that makes clear the UN report is lawful material under Belarusian law.

¶6. (C) Toman said the Lukashenko regime has stepped up its harassment of Ruml personally in recent weeks. In one incident, the KGB stopped Ruml's car while he was enroute to visit a dissident. Although the incident was tense, Toman said reports that Ruml was threatened with imprisonment are not accurate.

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